

State of the State Address
Governor Donald L. Carcieri
February 4, 2003

Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, my fellow General Officers, members of the Judiciary, distinguished guests my wife, Sue ... my mother, Marguerite ... my family ...and my fellow Rhode Islanders.

It is an honor to stand before you tonight to offer my first "State of OUR State Address."

I approach this evening mindful of the fact that we are living in a world fraught with peril and uncertainty punctuated, tonight, by a sense of sorrow ... as we mourn the loss of seven of this world's brightest, boldest and most intrepid citizens.

I ask you to join me in a moment of prayerful silence in memory of the talented and courageous crew of the space shuttle "Columbia."

As a nation, we are also wondering tonight whether we are on the brink of war.

As of today, more than 15-hundred Rhode Island reservists either have been deployed ... or are poised for deployment abroad. It is the largest, single National Guard deployment since World War II.

Sue and I have been on the tarmac and have participated in the emotional send-offs ... the good-byes to loved ones. These men and women are brave. Their families are strong. This nation is well served.

Tonight, as a tribute to ALL the women and men participating in "*Operation Enduring Freedom* and *Operation Enduring Eagle*" ... I would like to recognize the sacrifices of three Rhode Islanders who have already answered that call to duty:

- First Sergeant Thomas Dolan of Johnston;
- Master Sergeant Ronald Matthews of Providence; and
- Lance Corporal Allan Peabody of Coventry.

Their loved ones are here tonight. They, too, are making countless sacrifices --- whether as wives, parents, or children. They are shouldering many burdens. And they're doing it for our nation ... for each of us.

I'd like to ask family members Johnnie Mae Matthews, Christine Dolan and Christine Peabody to stand and be recognized. We salute you and offer your families our heartfelt prayers:

Tonight, we draw our thoughts to our own State of Rhode Island. I sense new feelings of hope, optimism and opportunity wherever I go.

As I said in my inaugural speech, our citizens are expecting a government that is competent, ethical, empathetic and accessible. And one that works together.

I have been governor for 28 days, 6 hours and 52 minutes. We've hit the ground running ... determined to reinforce these themes.

My first official Act on Day One was to issue an executive order on ethics. I will be pursuing more.

Two days later, I hosted a State House press briefing with the leadership of the General Assembly and put forward legislation calling for a Constitutional Amendment providing real separation of powers.

In the following days, we officially put to rest the idea of a container port at Quonset. We sped up deliveries of home heating oil. We opened up new facilities to shelter the homeless during the recent cold snap. We committed resources to fund affordable housing. We reached an agreement to seek a better deal for the taxpayers on video lottery terminal proceeds.

We reorganized the Economic Development Corporation—changed its mission and focus. We got to work on the “Big Audit” and are putting together a forward-looking budget proposal for fiscal year 2004.

We hosted our first “Open Door Thursday” session.

I christened a new generation, double-hulled barge the size of a football field built by Rhode Islanders.

I am meeting with the leaders of the General Assembly weekly.

Tomorrow, I will sit and talk with students from Hope High School.

So ... yes ... we have been busy. We have been engaged. And we have only just begun!

Tonight, I would like to share my vision for our future ... my vision for making Rhode Island “work better”.... for making Rhode Island government leaner, more forward-looking and more responsive ... for building a state we can all be proud of.

We have major challenges facing us. But they are manageable if we work together. Our fiscal situation is difficult, but not as bad as many other states’.

Tonight, I will outline the steps that Rhode Island must take in order to flourish. It's all about choices.... and we need to make tough choices.

My comments this evening will touch on four main topics: what we're doing to create good, high-paying jobs in Rhode Island.

What we're doing to fix our schools.

What we're doing to cut the cost of government and balance the budget.

And what we're doing to run our State better!

First and foremost ... jobs.

It's a subject that's on everyone's mind. If it's not your own job that you are worried about ... maybe it's your spouse's job ... or you're worried about future opportunities for your children or your grandchildren.

In order to make Rhode Island the "jewel of New England," we must provide our citizens with real job opportunities.

We must do what we've never done before --- set ambitious goals for job growth and challenge ourselves to meet them.

Until recently, our job growth has consistently lagged our neighbors.

Tonight, I am setting a goal: we will make Rhode Island a leader in job growth in New England.

Our goal is to create 20-thousand GOOD jobs in the next four years. I believe in setting **AMBITIOUS** goals. It will focus all of our attention.

- We will march forward with new and different uses for Quonset..... like focusing on technology and marine trades. We'll make Quonset a recreational destination, too with maybe a waterfront esplanade and bike paths!
- And we will work aggressively to help our local communities generate local jobs. That's key. Partnering with YOU ... and with the leaders of the communities YOU represent.
- We must build partnerships with world-renowned entrepreneurs and scientists already in Rhode Island. We are seeing a growing number of biomedical research companies putting down roots here in the Ocean State—drawing from the intellectual strength of our colleges, hospitals and medical school.

Let me mention one success story: Epivax. A locally owned company, based in Providence. They are developing a vaccine to treat and ultimately prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS.

Doctor Anne De Groot founded Epivax while working at Brown University. It's an example of how we can move ideas from the research lab to the commercial marketplace. We need more pioneers like Doctor DeGroot.

Doctor...would you please stand and be recognized?

To leverage the power of our intellectual capital ... I am proposing several targeted initiatives that will help us broaden and grow the economy.

- First, we need to double our investment in our business incubators. We call them our Slater Centers. Right now, we have four such centers ... each focusing on an area where Rhode Island has a competitive advantage. The \$7 million that's been invested thus far has generated more than \$100 million in private investment and nearly 300 jobs. Epivax is just one example of how planting the right seeds can yield an abundant harvest.
- Secondly, to further nurture the industries of tomorrow, I am proposing that we invest in research and development at the University of Rhode Island. Rhode Island ranks dead last in the nation in research and development dollars expended by our public schools of higher education. We need to change that. I am proposing that we build a new Center for Biotechnology and Molecular Biosciences at URI. Such a Center will attract world experts and businesses, alike ... folks who will bring high quality jobs with them.
- By the way, we must also change our rules to allow our professors more freedom to commercialize their inventions.

Thirdly, I am proposing that we dramatically increase our investment in worker training programs. We have a relatively new biotech company in this state, Amgen, located in West Greenwich...right off Route 95. Amgen is investing one billion dollars in Rhode Island. ONE BILLION DOLLARS.

They need workers. Skilled workers. And Rhode Islanders need jobs... good jobs.

There's a gap there.

We need to help Amgen --- and companies like them --- fill that gap. We will create a world-class biotech training facility to provide the skilled workers.

The State of Rhode Island will furnish the seed money to get this project off the ground. We will send a strong message to biotech firms across the globe that Rhode Island is ready to supply the talented workforce that 21st century companies demand. I want to take this opportunity to recognize the work of Lt. Governor Fogarty, Senate President Irons, and many others who have been advancing this project.

Simply put: what we intend to do is crank up our economic development efforts ... turn the ideas emanating from our colleges and universities into jobs ... and train our workforce to fill those jobs.

But that's only part of the equation. We need to give our children the tools to prepare for the adult world and those good jobs.

How?

By motivating and helping our young people experience success in their schools.

I am committed to raising the achievement of our low-performing schools. We will begin by implementing a cutting-edge high school redesign program at Hope High School. By separating schools into smaller clusters, we will ensure that each youngster receives the individual attention she or he needs. We will inspire our young people to excel in the classroom and achieve their goals. I'd like to share an example.

Joining us tonight is Christine Auxier. Christine has taught in the Theater Department at Hope for 11 years. She has been gifted with a special ability to ignite passion and excellence in her students. Christine is accompanied by ONE of her students Larinda Baker.

Larinda is a star! Under the guidance and encouragement of a caring teacher, Larinda has risen to the pinnacle....traveling abroad ... performing in an internationally acclaimed theatre festivalAND achieving the highest of scholastic honors. This is the kind of success we need to encourage.

Won't you join me in recognizing the accomplishments of Christine Auxier and Larinda Baker.

I would also like to recognize the entire Hope High team ... led by Providence Mayor David Cicilline, Superintendent Melody Johnson, Principal Nancy Mullen and most importantly the teachers at Hope High School. Hope's future success will pave the way for redesigning schools throughout Rhode Island.

Essential to this task is supporting our teachers. Teaching is an honorable and noble profession. My father, Nick, was a high school teacher and coach for 38 years. He changed lives. We have to give our teachers the training, resources, and environment they need to teach. A lot has changed in the classroom over the years.

Many of our children are exposed to life in its harshest and rawest form. But that doesn't change the basic learning needs.

In order to create a better environment for our teachers, we must give our principals the training and authority to manage their schools. And we must engage the parents and

community. I will be recommending that the Department of Education increase its funding of both teacher professional development and principal training programs.

You may be surprised to learn that Rhode Island has a high rate of adult illiteracy. It's heartbreaking. The waiting list at some literacy centers reaches into the thousands. I am proposing to increase our investment in adult literacy training. By helping Rhode Islanders acquire the skills to fill out a job application or read the directions on a medicine bottle ... we also widen the pool of talent to staff the businesses of tomorrow.

The ever-rising cost of higher education is putting "the dream" out of reach for many of our youngsters.

My wife and I were both able to go to college because of the state's scholarship aid program. That program, regrettably, has been allowed to wither. Tonight, I am proposing that we double our state support for scholarship grants.

At this point, you may be wondering how can I be talking about investing when we've got such major budget problems?

As I mentioned earlier it's all about choices. Our future success depends upon the choices we make today. We must be willing to redirect the money we are already spending.

One of the major problems we face is that the cost of staffing state government is too high. Recognizing this reality is not meant to diminish the good and honest contributions of state employees who work hard. In fact, I would like to take a moment tonight and thank our state employees for their commitment and dedication.

In the budget I will be submitting shortly, we are avoiding layoffs and preserving social service programs. However, that will necessitate adjustments to the spiraling costs of our benefit programs.

At the same time, we need to undertake a comprehensive review of our State's organization. To reduce our real cost of government, we must redesign it.

I am announcing tonight that we are formulating a project to begin this task --- the crucial phase of the "Big Audit." A steering committee will be formed with leaders of the General Assembly, labor and Department of Administration Director Bob Higgins. This committee will provide oversight to work teams that will be composed of our state employees. I am convinced this exciting project will unleash great potential.

We must confront these costs to close the \$200 million budget deficit that is projected for each of the next three years. Tax hikes are out of the question. We are already too heavily taxed which is inhibiting our job growth. In my budget message, I will outline our thoughts in more detail.

Creating jobs. Strengthening our schools. Wrestling our budget problems to the ground. We can only achieve these successes if we commit to working together and making the difficult choices.

Rhode Islanders can take pride in the cooperative spirit that has existed in this chamber in the few short weeks we have been in office. A fresh breeze is blowing, indeed. The new General Assembly leadership and I have come together to find solutions to some early issues. For that, I thank them.

I believe we share a common vision --- to build Rhode Island's image as a well run, business friendly state that cares deeply about its people and its unique quality of life.

It is in that spirit that I ask all of you in this chamber tonight to demonstrate to the people that their government can work together and pass a clear and strong separation of powers bill.

We have an historic opportunity. For too long, Rhode Island has been encumbered by an outmoded system of government that was designed for a time long past. Twice in the last four years, Rhode Islanders have voted overwhelmingly to change the system and create a government designed for the 21st century.

So, my fellow Rhode Islanders....what would I like you to take away from tonight's State of the State message?

First and foremostwe're working hard ...we're shaking things up ... we're generating new ideas ...we're building trust in government. We've heard so many encouraging things from so many of you.

We are going to balance the budget and do it in a way that will not harm those who rely on our help.

We're going to re-design State government to free up money so that we can provide for a brighter future.

We are going to work with the cities and towns at the local level to deliver jobs and opportunities in the neighborhoods and at Quonset.

We are going to open up public records ... and I urge the General Assembly to do the same.

We're going to find a **permanent** solution to the issue of affordable housing.

We're going to throw our energies into tackling the rising cost of health care. Our low-income neighbors ... our elderly and our working families need RELIEF.

We're going to devote time, money and resources to cultivating industries where we have a competitive advantage.

We will see to it that all of our citizens live in dignity. We will provide safety to the hungry, the homeless and the sick.

We're going to enact separation of powers by working with this General Assembly.

And --- oh, yes --- a couple more important things!

We're going to fix the Registry of Motor Vehicles. There is absolutely no reason in the world why we can't make things move faster there. We are going to make it possible for people to register their vehicles on-line.

And ... we're going to tear down the Jamestown Bridgefinally. I am putting money in next year's budget to begin that process. It's a safety hazard that the Coast Guard has repeatedly warned us about. I don't want anyone to get hurt.

In conclusion we're investing, we're reorganizing and we're chipping away at some of our more entrenched problems. We ARE making progress.

We are a State with great potential. We have many assets and advantages ... great natural beauty ... fantastic cultural diversity ... thriving arts and entertainment ... outstanding universities ... and a wonderful quality of life. We are poised for exciting growth opportunities.

I am energized and optimistic. If we summon the courage to work together, tackle our problems and make those difficult choices, we can lay the foundation for a bright future. Now is the time to do it.

I would like to thank the members of this new General Assembly for their support. There's clearly a new cooperative spirit.

We are truly blessed in the State of our State.

We are blessed by those courageous women and men serving to protect our freedom.

We are blessed by the gifts of our special place.

And we are blessed by the opportunity to serve as stewards and leaders.

For all of that, thank you. And may God bless Rhode Island and all of America.